



MINISAUCERS

M.J. Graeber

AS MAGONIA'S READERS may recall, I discussed a variety of UFO experience I called "Dynamic Displays" in *Magonia* No. 78 (June 2002) and No. 82 (August 2003).

Dynamic Displays (DDs) appear to be specific to the observer's unconscious psychical status at the time of their UFO sighting. Therefore, investigating and evaluating the event from this "subjective" perspective permits one to identify and grasp the UFO experience's "hidden" meaning.

The display is a "*Symbolic Representation*" of an *Emotional Tension* that seems to have the witnesses stuck in a state of anxiety, uncertainty and repressed fear.

The DD acts as a visually perceived form of "*Self Perception*" in which the UFO observer's inner fears are "*seen*" as an externalised situation and/or dilemma (i.e. a UFO sighting which is a scientific problem). I feel that this acts as a sort of "release valve" for pent up fears which are adversely affecting the UFO observer. *That's enough of the psychobabble!*

However, this time we are going to discuss yet another variety of UFO experience, which I stumbled upon while investigating reports and interviewing eyewitnesses in the late 70s and early 80s.

On the indoor observation of (and interaction with) miniature unidentified flying objects aka "Minisaucers"

Naturally, the idea of UFOs operating within the confines of someone's home surely exceeds the strangeness of the more traditional UFO sighting and close encounter reports. But such reports do exist and deserve equal attention from the UFO research community. For the most part, Minisaucers are thought to be *Alien Monitoring devices which are utilised to locate and precondition the individuals that the aliens wish to abduct*. In some of

the reports, these tiny spheres or globs of light appear to flit about the victim's premises - while other accounts indicate that they merely hover before the astonished witnesses' eyes.

But beyond performing these aerial antics and assumed functions, there are even reports that the Minisaucer lights created cracks or tears in the atmosphere through which alien creatures enter our dimensional plane. Although it is not very frequently mentioned, these Minisaucers behave somewhat like the tiny foo fighters (small globs of light) that daunted Allied and Axis pilots during World War II. A team of Allied military investigators were assigned the task of discovering exactly what the strange objects were, and came away from their efforts without success.

A similar failing occurred when the investigative teams attempted to find the launch sites of the mysterious "Ghost Rockets" that were seen coursing through the skies above Scandinavian countries just after hostilities had ended in the European Theatre. Actually it was these strange aerial objects that heralded the onset of the modern-day era of UFO sightings. The Kenneth Arnold sighting of nine gleaming discs over Mt. Rainier in 1947 was the incident which gave us the term "Flying Saucer" because of Mr Arnold's description to a newspaper reporter of how the disc-shaped objects appeared to fly - by skipping along (*perhaps like flat stones or saucers thrown and skimming across a pond's surface*).

Minisaucer Case Study No. 1 - Close encounter inside the office

This report involves the experience of a young man (age 23) who was a working college student at the University of Pennsylvania at the time of his Minisaucer sighting experience. He was aware of my interest in the UFO enigma but knew absolutely nothing about the

direction of my researches. He (Joe Delaney) is bright, reliable and also my younger brother's closest friend.

Joe worked nights at the university and, because of travel, work and study time overlaps, he frequently catnapped during his late-night lunch breaks. It was while Joe was awakening from such a snooze that he became aware of a dark fluttering object near the ceiling at one corner of the room.

Joe didn't move at first, as he just eyeballed the thing, thinking it was a bat. But that seemed to be improbable to Joe, since he was lying across folding chairs in a windowless cubicle in a secluded section of the building. Joe thought that perhaps someone may have placed the bat there as a practical joke, or that it might have entered the room through an unsecured ventilation shaft.

But Joe's continued scrutiny of the object revealed that the thing wasn't a bat at all - rather it was a black cylindrical object about six to eight inches in length and about an inch and a half in diameter. It was sort of floating in the air - silently wobbling in a gentle rocking motion. Joe noticed that the object had a hexagonal shape that reminded him of an antique rifle's barrel.

Joe abruptly sat up and, with the same body motion, he hurled the jacket - with which he had covered himself - at the thing near the ceiling. But Joe's hurried inspection of the crumpled jacket on the floor revealed that the object hadn't been trapped within it, even though Joe felt certain that he had caught the thing.

Comments

We have here, in Joe's report, a classic UFO sighting in miniature. For, most certainly, the object's unusual configuration, its oscillatory motion and noiseless aerial performance, are consistent with its being an enigmatic Flying Saucer. In fact, were it not for the drastic reduction in its apparent size and

its pronounced confinement within an office cubicle, there would be no telling how large, fantastically aerobatic, or distant Joe might have thought the object to have been.

So it seems that we have very little by which we might separate this Minisaucer report from the larger-scaled variety of UFO observations. One wonders, could it possibly be that Minisaucer experiences like Joe's might be mistaken for large-scale object sightings if the Minisaucer encounter had occurred outdoors; or if it had been spotted through a window, an open door, or from within an automobile?

If we should attempt to voice an argument against this possibility, based on the fact that Joe was sleeping just before he awoke and observed the Minisaucer, we are also obliged to remember that several legendary UFO incidents may have been staged under similar, if not precisely the same, circumstances.

The late psychiatrist, Dr Benjamin Simon, felt that Betty and Barney Hill's UFO experience may have involved a "dream absorption" episode of some kind. While Dr X, that miraculously cured French saucer witness that ufologist Aimé Michel frequently discusses in his writings, also awoke to discover a pair of UFOs flying towards his home.

Additionally, there is always the problem of the witnesses' estimates of the UFO's size and altitude being quite questionable, and UFO investigators frequently attempt to assist the witnesses by asking them to compare their recollection of the object that they had observed to that of some hand-held item viewed at arm's length. But this technique is believed to be rather crude and ineffective - as an aspirin tablet held between the thumb and forefinger at arm's length will completely block out the disc of a full moon. So it seems that unless the UFO passes in front of something that can be measured (in both size and distance from a definite observation point) it is very difficult to estimate the size, speed and altitude of a UFO with the unaided human eye.

Minisaucer Case Study No. 2 - Another interactive encounter

Mr Greene is a 35-year-old businessman who, after sleeping for slightly over seven hours, gradually awakens to a brilliantly sunlit bedroom, when he suddenly realises

that "a big black spot" is clinging to the ceiling almost directly over his head (approximate distance, six feet above Mr Greene's bed).

At first, the witness reacts as if "the thing" is a large spider, and he continues to lie in bed, perfectly motionless, while anxiously eyeballing the creature more intently (at this point in the experience Mr Greene is not only wide awake, but he is also extremely apprehensive about the situation he finds himself to be in).

However, since Mr Greene detects no appendages on the object, and because it hasn't moved at all, it slowly becomes apparent to him that that "the thing" isn't a spider but, rather, a convexly contoured oddity that closely resembles a cherry-filled chocolate cordial except that the surface of this object seems to be of a lack-lustre matte black finish.

At this point, Mr Greene's fears quickly diminished about the object possibly being a dangerous arachnid; and for reasons which he could not explain he found himself pondering the thought that "the thing" might move and, as fantastic as it may sound, at the very instant that Mr Greene thought that the spot might move, it actually *did* move!

Then, as he thought it should stop moving, it glided to a halt. Now it's important to note that Mr Greene stresses that these movements occurred in precise unison with his thoughts and they did not appear to occur so much as a split second afterwards.

Completely astonished, and somewhat amused by this turn of events, the witness thought "vanish" and, accordingly, the Minisaucer seemed to collapse into a minute central point and completely disappear, in much the same way that an image on a TV screen does when the set is turned off.

Then, Mr Greene desperately tried to think the Minisaucer back, but his efforts were in vain and the mysterious object was gone forever.

Investigative notes

When questioned about the possibility that the black object may have cast a shadow on the bedroom ceiling, Mr Greene couldn't recall seeing one. When the speeds of the object's movements between its stationary positions were estimated, they were thought to be in the range of one to three miles per hour (although estimated distances of only six

to eighteen inches were thought to have been traversed during the event).

Additionally, the Minisaucer's movements appeared to be deliberate, intelligently guided and very smoothly executed. Mr Greene also reports that the Minisaucer looked solid, although it may have been hollow, and that it was sharply contrasted against the white (textured) ceiling of his bedroom.

The observation lasted for an estimated 50 to 60 seconds and the witness said that four distinct movements occurred during the incident (the first being a movement to the left, a right, another to the left, and then the disappearance phase).

Comments

As I've already pointed out (in Joe Delaney's case), if this UFO sighting event had taken place outdoors and was reported to investigating ufologists, I believe there would be little doubt that the preliminary findings of their inquiry into the matter would suggest that not only was this "a good sighting report", but that "a process of selection and telepathic communion" had taken place between the observer and the UFO.

Both the assumed telepathic communion and the Minisaucer's curious disappearance characteristics have been reported by equally astonished UFO observers from around the world. Moreover, numerous pilots who were pursuing or attempting to elude a UFO, report that the object(s) seemed to know what manoeuvre they were about to execute, and that the UFO simply mimicked their actions or countered them accordingly.

Obviously, Minisaucer phenomena are equally shocking and perplexing to their unsuspecting observers as the larger-scaled variety of UFO sightings are, and both tend to leave the witness somewhat bewildered and slightly off-balance concerning what just happened to them; simply because Minisaucer phenomena differ very little in their overall complexity, strangeness, appearance and character to those of the far more commonly reported unidentified flying objects of the larger-scaled variety.

Minisaucer Case Study No. 3 - A close encounter in the park

I came across this Minisaucer sighting

when I was invited to participate in a UFO sighting report interview at the home of a MUFON researcher George Morgan (pseudonym) in south-eastern Pennsylvania. The case didn't involve a commonly reported UFO observation per se, but did involve a man's encounter with a **white disc of light**, said to be about the size of a 25-cent piece when viewed at arm's length. Curiously, the disc of light wasn't observed in the sky but rather upon the ground under a thin coating of snow which is commonly referred to as an "onion skin" layering.

When I arrived at Mr Morgan's home I was greeted by him, his wife (Linda) and a young psychologist who had a practice in N/E Philadelphia; his name was Stan Brewster (pseudonym), and Stan had an avid interest in UFO reports. We briefly exchanged a bit of small talk and coffee was served in the recreation room of the house where we awaited the arrival of the Minisaucer witness.

After 15-20 minutes had elapsed, the door bell rang and a young man came into the room escorted by George's wife. The young man, whom we'll call Erik (aged 23), sat down and rather nervously started to tell us his unusual story. Apparently he had been jogging in a park near his home several nights before, and noticed a small disc of white light shining upon the ground about 6 to 8 feet in front of him.

The light moved along directly in front of Erik and seemed to move at a speed which matched his own pace. When Erik stopped to take a good look at the disc of light, the light stopped. For some unexplained reason, Erik suddenly suspected that the light was caused by a rifle's telescopic laser beam and he feared that someone was about to shoot at him.

However, his quick search to trace a source for the light failed to indicate that the disc was laser-beam related at all. (The disc didn't have a beam extending to or from it, and Erik felt that such a beam would have been clearly visible as it passed through the snow that was gently falling at the time.) But, as moments passed and the light remained stationary, Erik started to run again and as he did the light disc moved along just ahead of him as it had previously. As Erik slowed his pace so did the spot of light, then as he increased his speed the disc did so accordingly.

What makes this unusual affair even stranger is that the disc was quite

luminous and appeared to be coming not from above the ground but from beneath the newly fallen (onion skin) layer of snow that covered it. Erik jogged on a nightly basis when weather permitted and he was well acquainted with the park's network of asphalt walkways and the park's lighting which served to illuminate them.

He was quite certain that the disc of light was **not a reflection** off his belt buckle, jacket's metallic snaps or zipper. Nor did he think it was a reflection off his wrist watch crystal. Moreover, because he was moving in and out of street-lamp illuminated areas of the park there were several points during the occurrence where Erik was running in complete darkness, yet the disc remained bright and moved along directly in front of him.

No longer fearing that that the light was a laser beam extending from a rifle, Erik walked and stopped moving as he became **amused** by the light and even more puzzled by its **antics**. There wasn't any obvious ambient light connected with his observation, which lasted about ten minutes and terminated just as Erik came to the end of his usual jogging routine in the park.

Erik excitedly told his wife about his experience when he arrived home and she suggested that he should report the incident to someone. They had recently read a feature story in a local newspaper on MUFON's investigative efforts in the area, so they decided to call George Morgan about Erik's encounter with the strange disc of light.

The interview lasted a little over one hour and many questions were asked of Erik; most pertained to the sighting particulars (time, distances covered, location, etc.). When that portion of the interview was fairly well exhausted, we decided to ask Erik his opinion and impressions of the incident itself. The result of that inquiry was quite fascinating and seemed to put an entirely different spin on the event.

Erik seemed to be quite bright, was very articulate and appeared to be aware of both the UFO phenomenon and the abduction lore. He didn't push the idea that he'd actually encountered a UFO or something which was emitted and directed his way by a UFO (although I got the impression that he assumed the disc of light was UFO related, or at least the result of a **paranormal experience** of

some kind).

Erik was clean shaven, his hair was well groomed and he wore military fatigue trousers, a brightly coloured shirt and fatigue jacket of the camouflaged variety. he also wore military-issue boots which were polished and black in colour. Though no one asked, I did not think that Erik came to the interview directly from a reserve meeting and the garb seemed to be of his own choosing. I make this assumption because Erik's hair was not cut very short and he hadn't carried or worn a fatigue cap into the Morgan's home.

Moreover, since I was invited to attend the interview as a guest, I did not feel that it was my place to question Erik on things related to his or his wife's occupation or educational background. I felt that to do so was the responsibility of the MUFON investigator and his psychologist colleague (I later learned that Erik's written report to MUFON had answered all those questions). But I did feel free to explore Erik's impressions and feelings about the incident, and even explored a little about his family situation and any other unusual experiences he may have had.

I learned during the course of the interview that Erik had been married for a couple of years and had a small child which both he and his wife adored. He expressed the thought that his mother also loved the baby very much, and that she was a wonderful grandmother who watched the child while both Erik and his wife pursued their careers.

Erik expressed the thought that his mother was as devoted to her grandchild as Erik's grandmother had been to him. He said that his grandmother was a very close and warm friend who had passed away about six months earlier. Erik felt that her passing was a **great loss** and something which he had not come to grips with. Erik's eyes filled with tears as he spoke of his grandmother whom he affectionately called "Bubby", which is a Jewish term of endearment as well as a nickname.

For Erik, her loss was both deeply felt and profoundly personal. Erik grew up with his Bubby as a guiding force of love and direction in his life. Bubby was both a grandmother and a friend who played a central role in his life - indeed a loving role that he had hoped his child would be nurtured by too. I asked Erik to tell us a

bit more about Bubby, and he complied with the story about her putting a halt to his childhood fear of sleeping in the dark by placing a small nightlight in his bedroom.

The single-bulb light was accentuated by small metallic discs that rotated and reflected off the bedroom's walls and ceiling. Bubby would then tell Erik bedtime stories and sing silly songs until her grandson drifted off to sleep. Erik said that his Bubby was always playing tricks on him, and that he would play tricks on her too - he said he missed the **tricks and surprises** that he and Bubby shared. I asked Erik if the disc of light in the snow could have been another of Bubby's tricks? A long silence filled the room, and Erik never responded. I then asked Erik "if this might be the sort of trick that Bubby would play on him?" In a soft whisper he replied, "Yes."

Both Stan the psychologist and George the UFO researcher felt that we had probably resolved the issue, and may even have helped out Erik, despite the fact that he hadn't seen a UFO. But I later learned that Erik had called George back requesting another interview (albeit this time without my being present). Erik said: "I don't want the goblin man there!" Apparently, Erik had misunderstood my comments and thought that I was offering him a ghost story sort of possible explanation for his encounter with the disc of light.

Erik's Minisaucer experience and his rejection of a psychological basis for the event is entirely consistent with many UFO witnesses and researchers' bias against a psychological probe, analysis and finding on a UFO incident. I think the fear is that to attribute an encounter to anything other than a purely physical occurrence is felt to imply that something is wrong with the observer. It may be the opposite that is correct, because the UFO incident may not be random, meaningless and without personal significance. It may be of some autonomously produced therapeutic benefit. (?)

Would it be wrong to consider the possibility that Erik's tricky and playful disc of light was actually a **beneficial display**, and perhaps part of his psyche's own healing process regarding his great loss and sorrow. Was he symbolically shown the way through life would still be illuminated by Bubby's enduring love and guidance? Or is such thinking just a

bunch of psychological mumbo-jumbo? I'll ask my readers to decide for themselves.

In any case, one thing seems to be clear. Had Erik's small disc of light been observed and reported to be coursing through the air instead of moving beneath the snow layering, it would have been entirely reasonable to suspect that this was a reliable observation of a UFO reported by a young man who was being toyed with by alien intelligences. In fact, some ufologists would suspect that Erik had unwittingly been in psychic communion with UFO operators during his experience.

A possible clue regarding the true nature of Minisaucer events

My readers may recall that in the opening of this essay I mentioned that perhaps Joe Delaney was dreaming of something (like the cylindrical object) that appeared to be fluttering in the corner of the room. If this assumption is correct, I'll cautiously extend that speculation to include that Joe's and Mr Greene's Minisaucer sightings were a mixture of both unconsciously generated dream imagery and the conscious perception of real-world elements (i.e. the room as a background) upon which the vivid and active dream imagery was played out. Moreover, it may be that since both observers were in the process of awakening as this "Dual Process of Perception" (DPP) was unfolding before their eyes, both observers felt confident that their perception was that of an entirely physical (real-world) event.

Sleep researcher Professor Nathan Kleitman, of Chicago University, informs us that: "There are approximately three REM (rapid eye movement) periods of slumber per night (apparently the eye movements occur because the person sleeping is also "physically reacting" to the dream as if they were actually "seeing" what was going on in their dream), and that the intervals dividing REM periods and non-REM periods of slumber are more or less constant (occurring in roughly 80 to 90 minute intervals)."

Professor Kleitman continues: "The later the dreamer's REMs commence, the longer they will last, some well over 30 minutes in duration."

What's more, according to the Professor, his studies indicate that during

the REM phases of slumber the electroencephalograph (EEG) records brain wave patterns which are remarkably similar to those which are produced when the subject is fully awake; so a sleep state which looks (on the EEG) like consciousness during REM dreaming phases appears to be far more similar to waking-state brain wave activity than those produced during non-REM slumber periods.

But beyond this there exist many other factors regarding the characteristics of my hypothetical DPP experiences which must be considered as possible "symptomatic indicators" of this unusual mixture (or overlapping) of mental functioning. These include "a pronounced sense of presence" within the experiencer's immediate environment which permits them to not only see the Minisaucer, but also to perform a critical evaluation concerning its identity - as well as the selection of a course of action to take in response to its presence.

Instinctual reaction

In both of the indoor cases we have examined the observer appears to have first reacted to his perception of the Minisaucer from a purely instinctual (self-protective) point of view. Joe Delaney remained perfectly motionless while lying on the folding chairs and carefully scrutinised "the bat" as it hovered ominously above him.

So, too, Mr Greene froze at the sight of the "large spider" on the ceiling and it was only after a process of rational evaluation concerning each object's identity had been reached that their primary fears subsided and the tone of the experience changed entirely.

Curiously, it may be that both of our witnesses were momentarily "paralysed" during the onset of their Minisaucer experience and were totally unaware of it.

Dr David Hufford, sleep researcher at the Hershey Medical Center in Hershey, Pa., has written a marvellous book on the tradition of a peculiar kind of nightmare known as "Old Hag Assaults" in which paralysis, difficulty in breathing, and a frightful sense of presence all play a part. In his remarkable book *The Terror That Comes in the Night*, Dr Hufford informs us that some of the subjects he's worked with during his study didn't realise that they were paralysed during the nightmare

because they assumed that they were just too scared to move.

Of course, over the years, since the onset of the modern-day era of UFO encounters, witnesses have reported being paralysed (or partially paralysed) during the sighting event. In some instances the paralysis seems limited to an arm, a leg or both legs; and some ufologists believe that the reported paralytic symptoms are not indicative of a true paralysis because the witnesses do not tend to lose their balance and fall down during the UFO experience.

Are these Minisaucer encounters related to the large-scale UFO experiences? Can we assert with any degree of confidence that Minisaucers are similar to the foo-fighter sightings of yesteryear or today's little globs of light that seem to herald the onset of an abduction experience? No, we cannot make such a quantum leap of logic regarding minisaucer events. But that doesn't mean that we should dismiss the phenomenon simply because we cannot weigh or measure it in a laboratory. But it seems that if we can gather enough information on experiences of this type we may be able to establish a reasonable and acceptable estimate of the situation on its emergence, and how we might feel about its potential significance as a down-to-earth "real" human experience that may have a larger-scale counterpart. (?)

However, just as we cannot hold a glass of love or pour out a cupful of hate, we know that these things are real and have a definite impact on our lives. We cannot learn anything about a care-giver's dedication to others by taking a sample of their tissue. These things are "personality traits and human emotional factors".

If Minisaucers are dream imagery which has autonomously appeared in our witnesses' "real" waking world's environment, it seems reasonable to suspect that some of the larger saucers may also hail from man's inner space (his unconscious mind), too.

Do the "Dynamic Displays" and "Minisaucer" events I've described above tell us anything at all about the UFO enigma, or are they merely another variety of ufoological nonsense?

Is ufology a science or a proto-science?

I'll leave these provocative questions to my readers.

OH, I DO LIKE TO BE BESIDE THE SEASIDE!

John Rimmer

AN INVITATION to speak at a conference organised by LAPIS (the Lancashire Anomalous Phenomena Investigation Society) in Blackpool (well, St Anne's actually) is hard to refuse. It had been about forty years since I had last visited the land of the Tower, trams and sticks of tooth-rotting rock, so when LAPIS organiser Janet Walkey invited me to speak on any topic of my choosing, the only decision to make was what to talk about.

The best UFO book that has been published for many years is *In Alien Heat* by Steve Dewey and John Ries. The rather odd title hides the fact that this is an account of the once-legendary Warminster UFO wave that transfixed the British UFO world in the late sixties and early seventies, and is now relegated to a footnote, at the most, in UFO books. As I, and my MUFOB/Magonia colleague and your esteemed editor John Harney, and our long-lost colleague Alan Sharp had some hand in these events, I thought this would be a suitable topic. At least it made a change from the rapidly declining topic of UFO abductions, which is my usual party-piece.

My wife and I drove up to Blackpool on the Friday before the conference, which was on Saturday 17 June, and found that a comfortable little hotel had been booked for the weekend for us and the other participants. The convivial evening meal and session in the hotel bar afterwards got the Conference off to a friendly start, and confirmed the Lancashire tradition of hospitality.

The three other participants were Philip Mantle, who was to talk about the saga of the 'alien autopsy' especially in the wake of the release of Ant and Dec's film; Richard Freeman, the Fortean zoologist who was to describe some of his adventures in hunting mysterious animals; and, most intriguingly, Mike Hallowell who was billed to speak on the phenomenon of childhood 'Imaginary Friends', a topic which I had never seen covered in any Fortean forum previously.

The conference was held in the local YMCA, which is an attractive modern multi-purpose building combining a conference facility with a sports venue.

First off was Philip Mantle, who outlined the story of the autopsy film from Santilli's first presentation of it to BUFORA, to the release of the feature film. Now I have vivid memories of Philip Mantle presenting this film to a Fortean Times UnConvention a good few years ago, and being more than a little proactive in promoting it, with little effect on the sceptical Forteans, who, on a show of hands, suggested that the autopsy was a load of tripe - which of course we now know it literally was, the alien dummy being filled with offal from Smithfield Meat Market!

I suspect that Philip might have skated a little quickly over this part of the saga, although he was refreshingly open about how he had been misled by Santilli's antics, and the damage that the whole episode had caused to BUFORA's credibility. I am sure it was BUFORA's role in promoting this farrago which led to its ultimate collapse. (I was amused at this year's UnConvention seeing BUFORA founding father Lionel Beer stalking the corridors wearing a badge reading "Last Living BUFORA Member"!)

If you've read Peter Rogerson's recent review of Merrily Harpur's excellent new book *Mystery Big Cats* (Heart of Albion Press) you will realise that Magonia's general 'psycho-social' viewpoint extends to mystery animals as well as UFOs. By and large we feel that these creatures represent a phenomenon which is not the result of real 'paws and pelt' creatures roaming the British countryside.

Richard Freeman and the Centre for Fortean Zoology, however, generally feel that Big Cats, and the many other semi-mythical creatures reported around the globe do represent real creatures, and in his talk he gave us an account of his own attempts to hunt down such creatures as the Mongolian Death Worm and the giant Naga serpent of South East Asia. I can't



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say he totally convinced me of the reality of all or any of these creatures, but he made a good case for at least some of the stories resulting from sightings of rare animals in unusual conditions. I suppose this is really the standard ufological position: that many apparently puzzling cases can be explained as natural phenomena, but there is always a small proportion which may be 'nuts and bolts' saucers or 'paws and pelt' animals.

Mike Hallowell's talk on childhood imaginary friends - or non-corporeal companions - was certainly the highlight of the weekend for me. I won't go into it in detail, as Mike has kindly written an article on the subject for the next issue of *Magonia* magazine; but what he made clear is that these 'imaginary friends' represent genuine experiences, and are not just part of children's make-believe world. They display characteristics which, when perceived in, for example ghosts or UFO-related entities, lead many people to conclude that these are actually existing creatures. Certainly this talk was an eye-opener.

I suppose I have to say something about my own contribution, in which I tried to position Warminster as the centre

of a peculiarly English UFO and contactee narrative, quite separate from the American, which has tended to obliterate the native tradition of the last thirty years. This was also the theme of Dewey and Ries's book, and along with Andy Roberts's recent articles in *Magonia*, and a forthcoming book he has co-authored with Dave Clarke, we may be seeing something of a rediscovery of the English UFO tradition.

It was a hot weekend, and although the hall looked pretty full to me, there were not as many attendees at the conference of the organisers had hoped. However, I was encouraged by the news that another north of England conference, boasting alleged big name speakers, some from America, managed to attract an audience of nine!

After the conference and dinner, and a few drinks in the bar, some of the speakers and LAPIS organisers decided to hold an impromptu sky-watch on the beach. However, Judith and I decided to explore the delights of Blackpool, and have a ride on the famous trams (regular readers of *Magonia* and the *Supplement* will have noted that both magazines' editors have a strange obsession with this form of transport). When we said we were going to do this, Janet Walkey warned us, "It's pretty weird in Blackpool on a Saturday night; if the aliens invaded then, no-one would notice!" Well, that's true enough. When I were a little'un (cue for Hovis-type brass band music) Blackpool's holiday wear extended to baggy shorts and a 'Kiss Me Quick' hat; now it seems to comprise the entire contents of an Anne Summers shop!

Janet and LAPIS certainly arranged an excellent conference, with all the speakers very well looked after, an extremely friendly atmosphere, a good location, and a wide range of topics, and most importantly, with a knowledgeable audience asking intelligent questions and contributing informed comments. We certainly enjoyed our trip to Blackpool (well, St Anne's actually).



LITERARY CRITICISM

**Reviews by
Peter Rogerson**

Paul Chambers. *The Cock Lane Ghost: murder, sex and haunting in Dr Johnson's London.* Sutton, 2006 £14.99

The Cock Lane ghost was one of the great scandals of eighteenth-century London. A man named William Kent had eloped to London with his deceased wife's sister, someone he was not allowed to marry by canon law, and made the mistake of lending money to his drunken wide-boy landlord, Richard Parsons. When he wanted repayment the landlord threatened him with exposure, but got sued instead. Meanwhile, Fanny the deceased wife's sister had died of smallpox in the eighth month of pregnancy.

This provided an ideal opportunity for revenge, and Parsons was soon putting it about that his house was haunted. His young daughter Betty heard knockings and scratchings, and was soon communicating in a knocking code with the spirit which obligingly revealed that it was none other than Fanny, who claimed to have been poisoned by her "husband".

The resulting scandal divided London, and set the Anglican establishment against the Methodists. The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, was a great believer in ghosties and ghouls and witches and such like, and had no time for the Pelicanists of his day, and a Methodist preacher named Moore became one of the ghost's chief champions. Those who

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adhered to the new rationalism of the enlightenment were outraged by all of this and a ferocious war of words developed. Among those who got involved were Dr Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith and William Hogarth, whose famous drawing "Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism" was partly inspired by the events at Cock Lane.

Parsons is in no doubt that the courts of the time were correct in seeing that this was an imposture, and for modern readers perhaps half the interest is in seeing how this story acted as a paradigm for many other cases in which young people became the centre of a variety of "anomalous and paranormal" events, and were able to fool the learned. The story has obvious parallels with the events in the Fox household which led to the birth of spiritualism, and one wonders if they could have learnt of Cock Lane through some chapbook or other, or whether the idea of communicating with spirits through knocks was an established folk custom.

Lest we attack the credulity of a past age, it's worth bearing in mind that a huge amount of rational common sense was said about this event at the time, some of the comments being none too politically correct by today's standards. Would today's press be so forthright, and how many of today's literati would side with scepticism? What, one wonders, would Hogarth have made of today's "Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism"?

Will Storr. *Will Storr Versus The Supernatural: one man's search for the truth about ghosts.* Ebury Press, 2006. £10.99.

Loaded journalist Will Storr sets out on a transatlantic ghost-hunting expedition, following the trail of an American demonologist, a variety of English ghost hunters and psychical researchers, the Vatican's top exorcist, and a sceptic or two. Obviously, if he interviewed the dwindling band of moderate parapsychologists and moderate sceptics there would have been little entertainment value, so the focus is on people who are, how shall we say, rather eccentric, words like barking mad not being exactly politically correct these days. Of course, some such as Maurice Grosse have a good excuse; they are overwhelmed with the grief of the loss of a loved one and looking for solace. Others are clearly

fantasists and attention seekers of various sorts. For example, there is the guy who is chasing the Satanists who hide in Clapham Woods, and for whom every passing rustic is a Satanist in disguise; then there is the has-been pop star who interviewed a family of vampires presided over by a werewolf.

It's clear that some of this stuff is getting through Storr's lapsed Catholic psyche, and he has a number of odd experiences, which strike the sceptical onlooker as excellent examples of the power of suggestion. Much can be said for many of the experiences narrated by others here. Storr is at least half convinced by all of this, and begins to sniff out ghosties and demons round the corners. His belief fluctuates, but is no doubt fuelled by his naive assumption that the 'investigators' he meets are basically honest and are not making things up or faking some of it themselves. Those of us who been in this sort of field for years know that is a very dangerous assumption to make. A good motto in this field is 'believe nothing, not even the evidence of your senses, and trust no one, not even yourself.'

Despite the talk of oppressive atmospheres, orbs, satanists, werewolves, shadows in the corners of perception, and of lurking demons, real evil only appears twice in this book. Once is the exorcism of an autistic child by a mad American fundamentalist, the other is the sinister Ultramontane traditionalist Vatican exorcist defending the fatal exorcism of a German teenager with classical ends justifying means arguments. You just know this guy would burn you at the stake if he could get away with it.

Sam Jordison. *The Joy of Sects: an a-z of cults, cranks and religious eccentrics.* Robson Books, 2005. £9.99

This book clearly aims to present the world of non-mainstream religious movements as a sort of freak show. That is not to say that some of the beliefs of some of the these groups are not very strange, but whether to the hypothetical Zeta Reticulan observer they would be any stranger than those of 'mainstream' religions is a moot point. What the latter tend to have on their side is a long history and a large reservoir of people who were born into the faith and accept what their parents, elders, community leaders, teachers, religious specialists etc. tell

them, without too much questioning. Some of the 'cults' mentioned herein such as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are already in that position and soon there will be second and third generation Moonies and Scientologists.

While many of these beliefs seem laughable to the outsider, we should remember that's the whole point. Believing what everyone else believes takes no effort; believing in something that sounds ridiculous or downright offensive to others takes commitment. Believing in the absurd and impossible becomes the badge of identity and solidarity, confrontations with the 'fallen' profane outside world become tokens of the in groups (specialness and holiness).

Religions act as surrogate tribes, they are badges of cultural identity; virtually all the passions unleashed by religious controversy, at least these days, are less about abstruse theology than about cultural identity and self esteem, which usually means the self esteem of the alpha males within the various communities. Equally important as most of the entries in this book show, religion whether minority or indeed majority, is about keeping control over who has sex with who. The specific badge of cults is that they tend to suggest that the leader can shag who he likes, and the rest have to abstain. More mainstream religions are concerned with the more general practice of class and gender oppression, keeping property with the 'proper' family etc.

MAGONIA READERS' MEETINGS

If you live in or are visiting the London area and are over 18 years old you are welcome to attend our informal monthly meetings. These are held on the first Sunday of each month, from about 7.15 to 10.30 p.m., at the Railway, opposite Putney station (South West Trains) and about 10 minutes' walk from East Putney station (District Line).

EDITORIAL

One thing that most of the "best" UFO reports have in common is that there are no independent witnesses. Indeed, those with only one witness are quite common; these include such "classics" as Arnold's Mount Rainier sighting, Socorro and Trans-en-Provence. There are cases where we are told that there were many independent witnesses, but somehow their testimony remains unavailable, the most notorious example being Trindade.

Much is made by the True Believers of reports by airline and military pilots, and police officers, as coming from trained observers whose testimony can be relied on, despite the fact that investigators such as Hynek and Hendry found that these people are just as likely to misidentify astronomical objects as other witnesses are.

Science writer Ian Ridpath has asserted:

"There is an effect at work which I term the UFO Uncertainty Principle which states that one cannot have a UFO sighting which is both highly reliable and highly specific."
www.ianridpath.com/ufo/ufoindex.htm

Some of the reliable ones, however, are reliable only in parts and it takes considerable effort to disentangle the truth from the lies, fantasies and delusions, a good example being the Berwyn Mountain case, which was solved by Andy Roberts years ago, although the locals are still arguing about it.

The practice of accepting single-witness reports, or reports uncorroborated by independent witnesses, as evidence for extraordinary events is one of the factors which ensures that ufology is unlikely ever to be taken seriously by the scientific community.

MAGONIA WEB SITES

MAGONIA

<http://www.magonia.demon.co.uk>

- ◆ Archives of articles and book reviews from *Magonia*
- ◆ Kevin McClure's *Abduction Watch*
- ◆ Andy Roberts's *Armchair Ufologist*
- ◆ Unfortunately, technical problems prevent this site being updated at present

MAGONIA Extra

<http://magonia.mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk>

- ◆ Archive of *MUFORG Bulletin*, the publication of the Merseyside UFO Research Group in the 1960s, which continued independently as *Merseyside UFO Bulletin* and eventually became *Magonia*
- ◆ Photo Gallery - pictures of ufologists and Forteans
- ◆ Notes and News - odds and ends
- ◆ The Aldeburgh Platform - Carl Grove's investigation of a strange case from the early 20th century
- ◆ Reviews - a selection from *Magonia*

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